

**Nikita
Khrushchev**

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Nikita Khrushchev, the grandson of a [serf](#) and the son of a coal miner, was born in Kalinovka, Ukraine on 5th April, 1894. After a brief formal education Khrushchev found work as a pipe fitter in Yuzovka.

During the [First World War](#) Khrushchev became involved in [trade union](#) activities and after the [October Revolution](#) joined the [Bolsheviks](#).

In January, 1919, Khrushchev joined the [Red Army](#) and fought against the [Whites](#) in the Ukraine during the [Civil War](#). After leaving the army he returned to Yuzovka where he returned to school to finish his education.

Khrushchev remained active in the [Communist Party](#) and in 1925 was employed as party secretary of the Petrovsko-Mariinsk. [Lazar Kaganovich](#), the general-secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, was impressed with Khrushchev and invited him to accompany him to the 14th Party Congress in Moscow.

With the support of Kaganovich, Khrushchev made steady progress in the party hierarchy. In 1938 Khrushchev became secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party and was employed by [Joseph Stalin](#) to carry out the [Great Purge](#) in the Ukraine. The following year he became a full member of the Politburo.

After the invasion of Poland in 1940 Khrushchev was given the responsibility of suppressing the Polish and Ukrainian nationalists. When the [German Army](#) invaded the Soviet Union in June, 1941, Khrushchev arranged the evacuation of much of the region's industry. During the [Second World War](#) Khrushchev granted the rank lieutenant general, and was given the task of organizing guerrilla warfare in the Ukraine against the Germans.

When the [German Army](#) retreated in 1944 Khrushchev was once again placed in control of the Ukraine and the rebuilding of the region. Khrushchev job was made more difficult by the famine of 1946. This brought him into conflict with [Joseph Stalin](#) who accused Khrushchev of concentrating too much on feeding the people living of the Ukraine rather than exporting food to the rest of the Soviet Union.

Khrushchev was demoted in 1951 and replaced as the minister responsible for agriculture. On the death of [Joseph Stalin](#) in 1953, [Gregory Malenkov](#) became both prime minister and head of the Communist Party. He appeared to be a reformer and called for a higher priority to be given to consumer goods.

In September, 1953, Khrushchev became first secretary of the Communist Party. He arranged for the execution of [Lavrenti Beria](#), head of the [Secret Police](#) and gradually he gained control of the party machinery. In 1955 he joined with [Nikolai Bulganin](#) to oust [Gregory Malenkov](#) from power.

During the 20th Party Congress in February, 1956, Khrushchev launched an attack on the rule of [Joseph Stalin](#). He condemned the [Great Purge](#) and accused Stalin of abusing his power. He announced a change in policy and gave orders for the Soviet Union's political prisoners to be released.

In the summer of 1956 [Gregory Malenkov](#), [Nikolai Bulganin](#), [Vyacheslav Molotov](#) and [Lazar Kaganovich](#) attempted to oust Khrushchev. This was unsuccessful and Khrushchev now purged his opponents in the Communist Party.

Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policy encouraged people living in Eastern Europe to believe that he was willing to give them more independence from the Soviet Union. In [Hungary](#) the prime minister [Imre Nagy](#) removed state control of the mass media and encouraged public discussion on political and economic reform. Nagy also released anti-communists from prison and talked about holding free elections and withdrawing Hungary from the [Warsaw Pact](#).

Khrushchev became increasingly concerned about these developments and on 4th November 1956 he sent the [Red Army](#) into [Hungary](#). During the [Hungarian Uprising](#) an estimated 20,000 people were killed. Nagy was arrested and replaced by the Soviet loyalist, [Janos Kadar](#). Imre Nagy was imprisoned and executed in 1958.

In 1958 Khrushchev replaced [Gregory Malenkov](#) as prime minister and was now the undisputed leader of both state and party. In the Soviet Union he promoted reform of the Soviet system and began to place an emphasis on the production of consumer goods rather than on heavy industry.

Khrushchev eased censorship in the Soviet Union and allowed *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, by [Alexander Solzhenitsyn](#) to be published. Some pointed out that this was part of his de-Stalinization policy and did not reflect a genuine increase in freedom. His critics pointed out that books such as *Doctor Zhivago* by [Boris Pasternak](#) were still banned.

In 1959 Khrushchev announced a change in foreign policy. In 1959 visited the [United States](#) and offered "the capitalist countries peaceful competition". Khrushchev was due to attend the Paris Summit Conference in 1960 when a reconnaissance plane was shot down over the Soviet Union. He cancelled the meeting and later that year at the [Union Nations](#) he attacked Western influence in the Congo.

When [John F. Kennedy](#) replaced [Dwight Eisenhower](#) as president of the [United States](#) he was told about the [CIA](#) plan to invade Cuba. Kennedy had doubts about the venture but he was afraid he would be seen as soft on communism if he refused permission for it to go ahead. Kennedy's advisers convinced him that Castro was an unpopular leader and that once the invasion started the Cuban people would support the CIA-trained forces.

On April 14, 1961, B-26 planes began bombing Cuba's airfields. After the raids Cuba was left with only eight planes and seven pilots. Two days later five merchant ships carrying 1,400 Cuban exiles arrived at the [Bay of Pigs](#). The attack was a total failure. Two of the ships were sunk, including the ship that was carrying most of the supplies. Two of the planes that were attempting to give air-cover were also shot down. Within seventy-two hours all the invading troops had been killed, wounded or had surrendered.

At the beginning of September 1962, U-2 spy planes discovered that the [Soviet Union](#) was building surface-to-air missile (SAM) launch sites. There was also an increase in the number of Soviet ships arriving in [Cuba](#) which the United States government feared were carrying new supplies of weapons. President Kennedy complained to the Soviet Union about these developments and warned them that the United States would not accept offensive weapons (SAMs were considered to be defensive) in Cuba.

On September 27, a CIA agent in Cuba overheard Castro's personal pilot tell another man in a bar that Cuba now had nuclear weapons. U-2 spy-plane photographs also showed that unusual activity was taking place at San Cristobal. However, it was not until October 15 that photographs were taken that revealed that the [Soviet Union](#) was placing long range missiles in Cuba.

President Kennedy's first reaction to the information about the missiles in Cuba was to call a meeting to discuss what should be done. Fourteen men attended the meeting and included military leaders, experts on Latin America, representatives of the CIA, cabinet ministers and personal friends whose advice Kennedy valued. This group became known as the Executive Committee of the National Security Council. Over the next few days they were to meet several

times.

At the first meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, the CIA and other military advisers explained the situation. After hearing what they had to say, the general feeling of the meeting was for an air-attack on the missile sites. Remembering the poor advice the CIA had provided before the [Bay of Pigs](#) invasion, [John F. Kennedy](#) decided to wait and instead called for another meeting to take place that evening. By this time several of the men were having doubts about the wisdom of a bombing raid, fearing that it would lead to a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. The committee was now so divided that a firm decision could not be made.

The Executive Committee of the National Security Council argued amongst themselves for the next two days. The CIA and the military were still in favour of a bombing raid and/or an invasion. However, the majority of the committee gradually began to favour a naval blockade of Cuba.

Kennedy accepted their decision and instructed Theodore Sorensen, a member of the committee, to write a speech in which Kennedy would explain to the world why it was necessary to impose a naval blockade of Cuba.

As well as imposing a naval blockade, Kennedy also told the air-force to prepare for attacks on Cuba and the Soviet Union. The army positioned 125,000 men in Florida and was told to wait for orders to invade Cuba. If the Soviet ships carrying weapons for Cuba did not turn back or refused to be searched, a war was likely to begin. Kennedy also promised his military advisers that if one of the U-2 spy planes were fired upon he would give orders for an attack on the Cuban SAM missile sites.

The world waited anxiously. A public opinion poll in the United States revealed that three out of five people expected fighting to break out between the two sides. There were angry demonstrations outside the American Embassy in London as people protested about the possibility of nuclear war. Demonstrations also took place in other cities in Europe. However, in the United States, polls suggested that the vast majority supported Kennedy's action.

On October 24, President [John F. Kennedy](#) was informed that Soviet ships had stopped just before they reached the United States ships blockading Cuba. That evening Khrushchev sent an angry note to Kennedy accusing him of creating a crisis to help the Democratic Party win the forthcoming election.

On October 26, Khrushchev sent Kennedy another letter. In this he proposed that the Soviet Union would be willing to remove the missiles in Cuba in exchange for a promise by the United States that they would not invade Cuba. The next day a second letter from Khrushchev arrived demanding that the United States remove their nuclear bases in Turkey.

While the president and his advisers were analyzing Khrushchev's two letters, news came through that a U-2 plane had been shot down over Cuba. The leaders of the military, reminding Kennedy of the promise he had made, argued that he should now give orders for the bombing of Cuba. Kennedy refused and instead sent a letter to Khrushchev accepting the terms of his first letter.

Khrushchev agreed and gave orders for the missiles to be dismantled. Eight days later the elections for Congress took place. The Democrats increased their majority and it was estimated that Kennedy would now have an extra twelve supporters in Congress for his policies.

The [Cuban Missile Crisis](#) was the first and only nuclear confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. The event appeared to frighten both sides and it marked a change in the development of the [Cold War](#).

The Military and the leaders of the Communist Party felt humiliated by Khrushchev's climbdown over Cuba. His agricultural policy was also a failure and the country was forced to import increasing amounts of wheat from Canada and the United States.

On 14th October, 1964, the Central Committee forced Khrushchev to resign. He lived in retirement in Moscow where he wrote his memoirs, *Khrushchev Remembers* (1971). Nikita Khrushchev died on 11th September, 1971.

Classroom Activities

[Cuban Missile Crisis](#)

(A1) In his memoirs Nikita Khrushchev claimed he was against Joseph Stalin's Collectivization Policy.

Collectivization was begun the year before I was transferred from the Ukraine, but it wasn't until I started work in Moscow that I began to suspect its real effects on the rural population - and it was not until many years later that I realized the scale of the starvation which accompanied collectivization as it was carried out under Stalin.

(A2) Nikita Khrushchev was the secretary of the Moscow Regional Committee in 1939. Khrushchev who was with Stalin when the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed, wrote about these events in his autobiography, *Khrushchev Remembers* (1971)

I believe the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 1939 was historically inevitable, given the circumstances of the time, and that in the final analysis it was profitable for the Soviet Union. It was like a gambit in chess: if we hadn't made that move, the war would have started earlier, much to our disadvantage. It was very hard for us - as Communists, as anti-fascists - to accept the idea of joining forces with Germany. It was difficult enough for us to accept the paradox ourselves.

For their part, the Germans too were using the treaty as a maneuver to win time. Their idea was to divide and conquer the nations which had united against Germany in World War I and which might united against Germany again. Hitler wanted to deal with his adversaries one at a time. He was convinced that Germany had been defeated in World War I because he tried to fight on two fronts at once. The treaty he signed with us was his way of trying to limit the coming war to one front.

(A3) In the 1930s Nikita Khrushchev worked closely with both Joseph Stalin and Lavrenti Beria.

Beria and I started to see each other frequently at Stalin's. At first I liked him. We had friendly chats and even joked together quite a lot, but gradually his political complexion came clearly into focus. I was shocked by his sinister, two-faced, scheming hypocrisy.

Even though I agreed with Stalin completely, I knew I had to watch my step in answering him. One of Stalin's favourite tricks was to provoke you into making a statement - or even agreeing with a statement - which showed your true feelings about someone else. It was perfectly clear to me that Stalin and Beria were very close. To what extent this friendship was sincere, I couldn't say, but I knew it was no accident that Beria had been Stalin's choice for Yezhov's replacement.

(A4) Nikita Khrushchev was critical of Stalin's cultural policies implemented by Andrey Zhdanov. When he gained power he gave permission for banned books such as *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, by Alexander Solzhenitsyn to be published.

I think Stalin's cultural policies, especially the cultural policies imposed on Leningrad through Zhdanov, were cruel and senseless. You can't regulate the development of literature, art, and culture with a stick, or by barking orders. You can't lay down a furrow and then harness all your artists to make sure they don't deviate from the straight and narrow. If you try to control your artists too tightly, there will be no clashing of opinions, consequently no criticism, and consequently no truth. There will be just a gloomy stereotype, boring and useless.

(A5) Nikita Khrushchev claimed that it was some time after Stalin's death before he realized the extent of his crimes.

I still mourned Stalin as an extraordinary powerful leader. I knew that his power had been exerted arbitrarily and not always in the proper direction, but in the main Stalin's strength, I believed, had still been applied to the reinforcement of Socialism and to the consolidation of the gains of the October Revolution. Stalin may have used methods which were, from my standpoint, improper or even barbaric, but I hadn't yet begun to challenge the very basis of Stalin's claim to a special honour in history. However, questions were beginning to arise for which I had no ready answer.

Like others, I was beginning to doubt whether all the arrests and convictions had been justified from the standpoint of judicial norms. But then Stalin had been Stalin. Even in death he commanded almost unassailable authority, and it still hadn't occurred to me that he had been capable of abusing his power.

(A6) Nikita Khrushchev, speech, 20th Party Congress (February, 1956)

Stalin acted not through persuasion, explanation and patient co-operation with people, but by imposing his concepts and demanding absolute submission to his opinion. Whoever opposed this concept or tried to prove his viewpoint, and the correctness of his position, was doomed to removal from the leading collective and to subsequent moral and physical annihilation. This was especially true during the period following the 17th Party Congress, when many prominent Party leaders and rank-and-file Party workers, honest and dedicated to the cause of communism, fell victim to Stalin's despotism.

Stalin originated the concept "enemy of the people". This term automatically rendered it unnecessary that the ideological errors of a man or men engaged in a controversy be proven; this term made possible the usage of the most cruel repression, violating all norms of revolutionary legality, against anyone who in any way disagreed with Stalin, against those who were only suspected of hostile intent, against those who had bad reputations.

(A7) Richard Nixon met Nikita Khrushchev in Moscow, in 1959. In his memoirs Nixon described the impression that Khrushchev made on him.

Khrushchev's rough manners, bad grammar, and heavy drinking caused many Western journalists and diplomats to underestimate him. But despite his rough edges, he had a keen mind and a ruthless grasp of power politics. Bluntly ignoring Western invitations for disarmament and détente, Khrushchev openly continued to stockpile weapons... many believed that he would have no qualms about using them to unleash a nuclear war.

(A8) In his autobiography Nikita Khrushchev describes his first meeting with John F. Kennedy after he had beaten Richard Nixon to become president of the United States.

I was impressed with Kennedy. I remember liking his face, which was sometimes stern but which often broke into a good-natured smile. As for Nixon... he was an unprincipled puppet, which is the most dangerous kind. I was very glad Kennedy won the election... I joked with him that we had cast the deciding ballot in his election to the Presidency over that son-of-a-bitch Richard Nixon. When he asked me what I meant, I explained that by waiting to release the U-2 pilot Gary Powers until after the American election, we kept Nixon from being able to claim that he could deal with the Russians; our ploy made a difference of at least half a million votes, which gave Kennedy the edge he needed.

(A9) James Reston, a journalist on the New York Times newspaper, travelled to Vienna with President John F. Kennedy when he met Khrushchev for the first time. He commented on this meeting three years later in an article for his newspaper.

Khrushchev had studied the events of the Bay of Pigs; he would have understood if Kennedy had left Castro alone or destroyed him but when Kennedy was rash enough to strike at Cuba but not bold enough to finish the job, Khrushchev decided he was dealing with an inexperienced young leader who could be intimidated and blackmailed.

(A10) Theodore Sorensen was a friend and speechwriter for John F. Kennedy. He was with Kennedy in Vienna and later wrote about the meeting between these two men.

Neither Kennedy nor Khrushchev emerged victorious or defeated cheerful or shaken. Each had probed the other for weakness and found none. Khrushchev had not been swayed by Kennedy's reason and charm. Kennedy had not been panicked by Khrushchev's tough talk.

(A11) Elie Abel's book, *The Missiles of October: The Story of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, was published in 1966. In the book Abel comments on John Kennedy's meeting with Khrushchev

in Vienna.

There is reason to believe that Khrushchev took Kennedy's measure at their Vienna meeting in June 1961, and decided this was a young man who would shrink from hard decisions... There is no evidence to support the belief that Khrushchev ever questioned America's power. He questioned only the President's readiness to use it. As he once told Robert Frost, he came to believe that Americans are "too liberal to fight."

(A12) [Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* \(1995\)](#)

Khrushchev's secret speech at the XXth Party Congress caused a political and psychological shock throughout the country. At the Party krai committee I had the opportunity to read the Central Committee information bulletin, which was practically a verbatim report of Khrushchev's words. I fully supported Khrushchev's courageous step. I did not conceal my views and defended them publicly. But I noticed that the reaction of the apparatus to the report was mixed; some people even seemed confused.

I am convinced that history will never forget Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's personality cult. It is, of course, true that his secret report to the XXth Party Congress contained scant analysis and was excessively subjective. To attribute the complex problem of totalitarianism simply to external factors and the evil character of a dictator was a simple and hard-hitting tactic - but it did not reveal the profound roots of this tragedy. Khrushchev's personal political aims were also transparent: by being the first to denounce the personality cult, he shrewdly isolated his closest rivals and antagonists, Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich and Voroshilov - who, together with Khrushchev, had been Stalin's closest associates.

True enough. But in terms of history and 'wider politics' the actual consequences of Khrushchev's political actions were crucial. The criticism of Stalin, who personified the regime, served not only to disclose the gravity of the situation in our society and the perverted character of the political struggle that was taking place within it - it also revealed a lack of basic legitimacy. The criticism morally discredited totalitarianism, arousing hopes for a reform of the system and serving as a strong impetus to new processes in the sphere of politics and economics as well as in the spiritual life of our country. Khrushchev and his supporters must be given full credit for this. Khrushchev must be given credit too for the rehabilitation of thousands of people, and the restoration of the good name of hundreds of thousands of innocent citizens who perished in Stalinist prisons and camps.

Khrushchev had no intention of analysing systematically the roots of totalitarianism. He was probably not even capable of doing so. And for this very reason the criticism of the personality cult, though rhetorically harsh, was in essence incomplete and confined from the start to well-defined limits. The process of true democratization was nipped in the bud.

Khrushchev's foreign policy was characterized by the same inconsistencies. His active presence in the international political arena, his proposal of peaceful co-existence and his initial attempts at normalizing relations with the leading countries of the capitalist world; the newly defined relations with India, Egypt and other Third World states; and finally, his attempt to democratize ties with socialist allies - including his decision to mend matters with Yugoslavia - all this was well received both in our country and in the rest of the world and, undoubtedly, helped to improve the international situation.

But at the same time there was the brutal crushing of the Hungarian uprising in 1956; the adventurism that culminated in the Cuba crisis of 1962, when the world was on the brink of a nuclear disaster; and the quarrel with China, which resulted in a protracted period of antagonism and enmity.

All domestic and foreign policy decisions made at that time undoubtedly reflected not only Khrushchev's personal understanding of the problems and his moods, but also the different political forces that he had to consider. The pressure of Party and government structures was especially strong, forcing him to manoeuvre and to present this or that measure in a form acceptable to such influential groups.

(A13) [Alexander Dubcek, *Hope Dies Last* \(1992\)](#)

My Russian friends learned about Khrushchev's secret speech about two weeks after it happened. A representative of the Central Committee came to the school and read excerpts at their Party meeting. No text circulated. It was a strictly confidential intra-Party announcement, and we foreign students were told nothing, then or later. I, however, learned very quickly about the speech and

about many additional details which confirmed rumors that had been circulating for months. Still, it was the official truth that had the greatest impact.

To tell the truth, I was not quite ready to hear much of what they were saying, and I was shocked when they stated bluntly that Stalin had been a murderer. There were many more shocks waiting to be sure, but this one was too sudden and too momentous - the man had for so many years portrayed himself as the embodiment of everything I wanted to believe in. Now I could no longer separate Stalin from the bad side of things, could no longer assume he did not know. Now it seemed he was the very cause of all the woe.

A major source of these revelations were the prisoners who were then starting to return from the camps of the Gulag. Their stories quickly spread. It was more and more obvious that all of them were innocent, which meant that the other millions, those who could not return, those whose graves were scattered across the country, had also been innocent. This included the best-known victims of the great purges of the 1930s, a time I remembered so vividly. It was a terrifying thing to learn.

Apparently most other foreign students, including those from Czechoslovakia, were insulated from this ferment until well after the Twentieth Congress. I have to admit that I hesitated to tell them what I was hearing from my Russian friends. Since my very young years, I have been inclined to think things through before making a move or a judgment, and this was no exception. It took me time to digest this flood of depressing news and to separate men from ideas and the good from the bad.

Among my Russian friends, Khrushchev was the hero of the day. The story circulated that he had dared to make the speech before the delegates against the will of the majority of the leadership, who had been involved in the mass repressions. In 1957 they conspired against Khrushchev and tried to overthrow him, but he was smarter and won the struggle against Molotov Kaganovich, and the rest.

(A14) [Herbert Morrison, *An Autobiography* \(1960\)](#)

When Khrushchev came with Bulganin on 25 April, 1956, to that by now famous dinner with the Parliamentary Labour Party, he appeared at first to be a quite new type of Russian leader - jolly, ready to laugh and be friendly, and on the surface perfectly genuine. I suspected that it was a post-Stalin policy of the Kremlin to choose extrovert, human personalities for positions of power and public office so long as they had brains and Communist convictions as well.

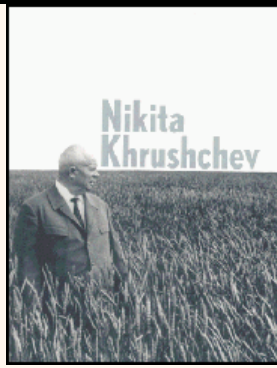
At the dinner Khrushchev went through the motions of not wishing to make a formal speech, wanting to leave the limelight to Bulganin, who was of course Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers and Prime Minister. Bulganin spoke conventionally and courteously, friendly greetings to Britain and all that.

Mr. K. did speak, as I knew he would. He started his speech pleasantly enough with harmless, friendly material, but the longer he spoke the more he boasted. It was the usual sort of thing. The Soviet Union had won the war. Britain had done little. The men who most obviously showed their annoyance at this were George Brown and Aneurin Bevan. Soon they were making protests which Khrushchev could not pretend he had not heard.

This annoyed Khrushchev very much and he lost his temper. He made it very plain that he disliked being contradicted and that he was not accustomed to it. He was cross also when Gaitskell raised the question of the Communist imprisonments of Social Democrats.

Next day, on the eve of their departure, I attempted to cheer Khrushchev up but his anger had not subsided and he took the opportunity to denounce the entire British Labour Party.

Khrushchev is undoubtedly a clever man; either a dangerous one or a man who will be valuable to the cause of peace. It is impossible to know yet whether he is playing a part or being genuine.



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